

Bringing holiday cheer A FAMILY TRADITION

by Ryann Kokkeler

A tree represents Christmas spirit to many people, and I think there's a major need for some spirit this year.

I've gotten to experience first hand some of the spirit and joy that has come amidst this pandemic through my grandma's Christmas tree farm, Carroll's Country Christmas Trees in Veneta.

My family has been involved in logging for many generations before me, but just two generations back my grandma decided to start planting and harvesting Christmas trees. My mom and her siblings helped to plant, harvest and sell the trees all out of the back of a truck at the farm, starting when they were in middle school. Flash forward 41 years at that same farm, we now sell them out of a huge barn instead of a pickup truck, and we've even added some extra Christmas flare such as hayrides that are perfect for families, a sweet shop full of homemade Christmas goodies and a custom built Christmas playhouse for the little ones to climb on and play in.

Many people are showing up this year to get a tree and have a wholesome family experience amidst these scary times. So far we've doubled our sales this year, selling a whopping 800 trees on our first three days of being open after Thanksgiving; normally it's about 400. On average, we sell around 200 trees on a weekend day, but we just broke our record with 330 trees sold the first Saturday of December! In past years we've never had more than two or three cars waiting at the gates when we open, but on our opening day there were 14 cars parked along Perkins road patiently waiting with their flashers on.

Many customers said it was their first time getting a real tree, and how this year seemed to be as good as any to start a new tradition. "It was really cool to see everyone come out to get their tree; all the people I saw seemed to be especially happy!" senior Shelby Jones said.

And although this year we've had to change the way we do some things here at the farm, people have barely noticed; they're just happy we're open. I love being able to spread Christmas cheer every year working here, but this year feels different. I feel like I'm actually making a difference in these people's lives by bringing some Christmas spirit into their living rooms and a smile on their faces.



Senior Ryann Kokkeler as a first grader working on her family's farm, with her grandmother Sharon Carroll the owner and her mother Stacy Kokkeler.